694. i. 10.
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THE

Bleſſings Enjoyed by Engliſhmen,

A

MOTIVE FOR THEIR REPENTANCE:

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

GREENWICH CHURCH,

On the 19th of April 1793.

(THE DAY APPOINTED FOR A GENERAL FAST;)

AND

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CONGREGATION.

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1793.

A

SERMON.

ROMANS, c. ii. v. 4.

—THE GOODNESS OF GOD LEADETH THEE TO REPENTANCE.—

THE infinite goodneſs of God and the wickedneſs of man form ſuch a ſtriking contraſt in the phænomena of the moral world, that a mind muſt be loſt to all diſcernment and ſenſibility, not to perceive, and at the ſame time to be deeply affected by the contemplation of, it. Ineffable mercy and loving-kindneſs appear to be immutable attributes of the one; while ingratitude, diſobedience, and impenitence, too generally mark the character of the other. " With God," as the Pſalmiſt obſerves,

" there is mercy; there is plenteous redemption:"
—" but the wickedneſs of man, as before the de-
" luge, is ſtill great in the earth; and every ima-
" gination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil
" continually."—Gen. vi. 5. The natural conclu-
ſion deducible from this poſition, is; that man ought to humble himſelf before God; that he ſhould repent of his ingratitude; ſhould ſupplicate his forgiveneſs; and ſhould endeavour to atone for his paſt ſins and tranſgreſſions by future amend-ment and reformation of life. This is the natural concluſion to be drawn from the premiſes laid down: and as we are now aſſembled, publicly to bewail, and to entreat God's forgiveneſs of, our national ſins; I cannot propoſe a ſtronger incite-ment to the performance of this duty, than to take a general view of the national bleſſings we enjoy:--- and to conſider the text, as addreſſed to us, not merely as individuals; but as individuals, and as ſuch they are equally applicable to us, forming and

and

conſtituting a part of a great and extenſive empire: and, if ever people had inducement to repent of their tranſgreſſions, and to enter upon the duty of reformation, from conſideration of the bleſſings which God has beſtowed upon them as a nation, we of this country undoubtedly have: for,

1ſt, It has pleaſed God to give us a land of plenty; "a land flowing with milk and with honey." Every production neceſſary to the ſuſtenance and comfort of life, owing to the fertility of the ſoil and the temperature of the climate, grows here in the greateſt abundance. "Our hills and our paſtures "are covered with herds and with flocks; and our "valleys ſtand ſo thick with corn, that they laugh "and ſing." Pſ. lxv. 14.

Our rivers, our lakes, and our ſeas too, abound with fiſh; our foreſts with game, and our orchards and gardens with the moſt delicious fruits; ſo that nothing is wanting, that can contribute, either to the ſupply of our neceſſities, or to the gratification

of

of our palate or deſires.—The inſular ſituation of our country is alſo a bleſſing of ineſtimable value; for it ſecures us from any ſudden irruption of our enemies, who from envy of our felicity might wiſh to invade, and diſturb us, in the enjoyment of it. And, to add to our ſecurity, our woods are ſtored with timber, eſpecially with oak ſuperior to any other in the known world, and our mountains with ore; ſo that we can neither want ſhips to protect, nor arms to defend ourſelves.

The healthineſs and mildneſs of our climate is a circumſtance of too much importance to be omitted in this enumeration; and we cannot but reflect with gratitude, that neither hurricanes nor earthquakes lay waſte our provinces; nor does plague or peſtilence, as in many other climates, deſolate our cities.—To conclude this ſummary of the natural bleſſings and advantages, which we of this fortunate and happy iſland, through the goodneſs of God's providence, participate of; the generally hale conſtitution of

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almoſt all, who have not either enervated themſelves, or whoſe parents have not been enervated, by vice and intemperance, may juſtly be reckoned in the number of our national bleſſings; for it is to the temperature of the climate that it is in great meaſure owing; as it almoſt inſures to thoſe who poſſeſs it, the enjoyment of a healthy, a long, and a happy life.

Theſe natural bleſſings are of ſuch value and importance, as to demand our warmeſt tribute of praiſe to the bountiful Giver of them; and at the ſame time contrition and repentance for our ingratitude in having diſobeyed the laws, and ſinned againſt the authority of ſo gracious and good a Being.

I proceed, 2dly, to conſider the civil bleſſings and advantages, which we partake of.

The form and conſtitution of our Government is exhibitive of the moſt incomparable wiſdom and excellence. It is of that happy texture, which

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ſtateſmen and philoſophers of old contemplated as poſſible in idea, as a form of imaginary beauty; but which they deemed too perfect for the frailty of man to reduce to practice. It is compoſed of monarchical, ariſtocratical, and democratical principles; and compriſes the advantages of each of theſe forms of government, without being ſubject to the inconveniences of any of them.—The King, as ſupreme magiſtrate, is intruſted with the execution of the laws, and has the power of doing good; but he is reſtrained by the authority of the ſame laws, to which he is alſo ſubject, from doing evil. He is, as it were, the main ſpring in the vaſt machine of government, that puts every other part of it into motion.—The Houſe of Peers ſerve as a balance to regulate this motion, and to prevent its being too much accelerated or retarded.—The Commons are the wheels, by which the movements and operation of the machine are performed.—Under this admirable government, every component part of

which

which is neceſſary to the perfection of the whole—all orders and ranks of people are equally protected in the enjoyment of their rights, whether natural, civil, or religious.—The King has his prerogative: the Peers have their privileges: and the Commons have their rights and franchiſes.—The law affords equal protection to all, and every one, of theſe: nor can any one order encroach upon, or oppreſs, the other.—The ſentence of the law depends upon the judgment and deciſion of twelve perſons; ſelected and choſen for the moſt part from that order and claſs of people, to which the defendant party belongs:—and the ſpirit of the law breathes freedom and happineſs, and is immediately directed to the benefit, of the ſubject. The Habeas Corpus Act ſecures every one in the enjoyment of his perſonal liberty; as the inſtitution of juries does, in that of his life and property. The Act of Toleration protects all in the profeſſion and exerciſe of their religious opinions; and that Magna Charta,

that palladium, of the poor, the ſtatute of Queen Elizabeth, defends the indigent, the diſabled, and the unfortunate, againſt all the intolerable evils of poverty; by obliging every pariſh to find employment, or elſe to make proviſion, for their poor.—Can any thing be deviſed or invented more admirable; or, is there any other country in the world, where the ſame or equal advantages are to be enjoyed?—In every community the diſtinctions of rich and poor, high and low, noble and ignoble, neceſſarily muſt prevail: they are founded in the nature of man. All men are not born with equal powers and capacities: i. e. with equal ſtrength of body; equal ſtrength of mind; or with equally ſtrong paſſions and inclinations.—This difference creates a difference, and forms various tints and ſhades, in the characters of men; which gives ſome a ſuperiority and pre-eminence over others. Were all men endowed with preciſely the ſame corporeal, the ſame mental, and the ſame moral

powers,

powers, the moſt perfect equality would prevail univerſally; nor would one man in any one reſpect prevail over, or be ſuperior to, another. There would be no need moreover for any eſtabliſhment or form of government: for the neceſſity of government ariſes from this natural difference or inequality amongſt men; to prevent the injuſtice and oppreſſion, which would otherwiſe inevitably follow from it. But, it having pleaſed the great Creator of the world to form men with different powers and endowments, inequalities muſt ariſe, beyond the reach of human ſagacity to prevent or remedy.—For ſuppoſe for a moment the moſt perfect equality to be eſtabliſhed, that can poſſibly be deviſed: that no one man ſhould poſſeſs a greater portion of riches, or honours, or of any other of the advantages of this world, than another; would not this equality, under the diverſity of characters juſt now pointed out as diſcriminating mankind, be overturned and deſtroyed, almoſt as ſoon as eſta-

 bliſhed?

bliſhed? Would not the induſtrious, the ſober, the parſimonious, add to his ſtore; while the idle, the prodigal, and the profligate, daily detracted from his? Would not the brave and the virtuous be generally reſpected and eſteemed; while the coward and the diſſolute became objects of contempt? Here then is the baſis, the foundation of both riches and honours: here is the origin of the diſtinctions abovementioned. And ſurely theſe diſtinctions are both juſt and reaſonable: for without doubt, the man, who employs his time and labour, who denies himſelf indulgence and gratification, to provide for a family, is juſtly entitled to a larger ſhare of riches than another, who never troubles or concerns himſelf about them; who never works, but lives in idleneſs and diſſipation; waſting his ſubſtance in expenſive and riotous living; and leaving his family in miſery, and to ſhift for themſelves. There cannot be ſo unreaſonable a reformiſt as not to allow this.—So alſo, a

man,

man, who were to betray the intereſts of his country by cowardice or treachery, would by no means be entitled to the ſame degree of honour and reſpect, as another who at the hazard of his life might gallantly defend it; defeating the fleets, vanquiſhing the armies; and, as has happened within our own memory, taking captive perhaps the commanding admirals of three powerful and hoſtile nations *. There cannot be a moment's heſitation upon the ſubject. Diſtinctions then there muſt be: and that is the beſt and moſt perfect government, which opens the way to theſe diſtinctions for virtue and deſerving merit; and which ſecures the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of them to thoſe, who have juſtly acquired them by their merit:—And here I am proud, and exult to obſerve, that ſuch is the government of this country: for under the

* The late Lord Rodney defeated in three different engagements the Spaniſh, the Dutch, and the French fleets; and took priſoners the commanding admirals of each.

ſanction

ſanction of it the pooreſt individual, if he has ingenuity and induſtry, needs not deſpair of acquiring riches; nor the meaneſt, the moſt obſcure, the moſt ignoble, if he has merit, of attaining to honours *.—And having obtained theſe advantages, as a further recompenſe and encouragement for virtue, the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of them are ſecured, not only to himſelf; but to what is frequently much dearer to him than himſelf, to his poſterity and offspring.—Happy, happy country, that can boaſt of ſuch ineſtimable bleſſings and advantages! How thankful ought we to be to God for having caſt our lot in ſo fair a land! And how truly contrite and penitent for that ingratitude, that diſobedience, thoſe ſins and tranſgreſſions, wherewith we have offended him.

But, we ſhall be further ſtimulated and incited to

* The late Sir Richard Arkwright, from being a common barber or hair-dreſſer, roſe, by his ſuperior merit and ingenuity, to the dignity of a Baronetage; and died worth at leaſt, it is ſaid, 300,cool. ſterling.

this

this important and neceſſary duty of repentance; if we reflect upon the danger with which we are threatened, of loſing and being deprived of theſe invaluable bleſſings, by the inſidious deſigns of that perfidious nation, which has ever been the rival and the envier of our proſperity.---France, a prodigy of every crime and enormity under heaven,---after overturning the altars of, her God;---after imbruing her hands in the innocent blood of her ſovereign;---after trampling upon the moſt ſacred rights;---after violating every principle of virtue, of truth, of juſtice and humanity;---and after deſolating every city and province within her own territories;---France, after exhibiting this moſt dreadful ſpectacle to the world, which muſt ſtrike horror and diſmay into every, both preſent and future, generation, is endeavouring, in defiance of repeated profeſſions, and in open violation of the moſt ſolemn treaties, to rob and deſpoil us of the bleſſings I have here enumerated. Like the malignant ſpirit that fell from heaven,

heaven, ſhe ſeems to find no reſpite to the miſeries ſhe is overwhelmed with,---no comfort to her agonizing ſoul, but in the hope of involving and implicating, either by ſecret machinations or open and avowed hoſtility, this and every other country, in guilt and calamity equal to their own.---Her open and avowed hoſtility we fear not. We rely, with God's aſſiſtance, upon the valour and profeſſional ſkill of our officers and commanders; and upon the heroiſm of our fleets and armies; to meet, and, as they heretofore ever have done, to defeat them.—Their ſecret machinations are more dangerous; becauſe being carried on, either in the dark or under falſe colours, they are not ſo eaſily diſcovered or guarded againſt. Yet even here we will not deſpair; but, under the providence of the ſame good God, will truſt to the vigilance of our governors, the activity of our magiſtrates, our own endeavours, and the endeavours of every virtuous and honeſt man; to render them fruſtrate and abortive.

Let

Let us all join hand and heart to oppoſe the inſidious deſigns of this treacherous enemy: let us ſupplicate heaven to give ſucceſs to our cauſe, which is the cauſe of juſtice; and to avert the danger we are threatened with; overlooking our errors, and pardoning our offences. The intereſt we have at ſtake is of the greateſt magnitude: it is the intereſt of religion,---liberty,---property,---all the ſocial and tender affections; and of every thing that is dear and valuable to us. And what is the lure held out to us, to blind our eyes and faſcinate our underſtandings, that we ſhould ſacrifice this intereſt? Is it to exchange our happy government for the tyranny and deſpotiſm of a rabble? our juſt and equal laws for the ſenſeleſs and arbitrary deciſions of a mad multitude? Is it to exchange the bleſſings of plenty, domeſtic enjoyment and tranquillity, the gains of honeſt induſtry, the riches of extenſive commerce, the opulence of populous cities, and the exuberant produce of fertile and well cul-

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tivated fields;---is it to exchange all theſe bleſſings for the horrors of civil war, for rapine and plunder, for empty and deſerted magazines, for ruined and depopulated towns, for barren and uncultivated fields and deſarts, for famine, for bloodſhed, for the deſtruction of religion, of virtue, of property; for wretchedneſs and miſery of every kind in ſhort? Is this the lure held out to us? To our aſtoniſhment, and the aſtoniſhment of all the world, be it ſpoken, it is. France inſidiouſly invites us to fraternize with her; to exchange our happineſs and proſperity for her miſery and wretchedneſs: and ſhe threatens to compel us, if we refuſe to accept her invitation. She ſays unto us, Come and be like unto me; and loudly proclaims her happineſs, her liberty and equality: but it is the liberty of banditti, the equality of fiends, and the happineſs of Pandæmonium. If ever any people enjoyed true happineſs, true liberty, and true equality, we of this fortunate iſland do: for here, "Every man

"dwelleth

" dwelleth ſafely under his vine and under his fig-
" tree, and none maketh him afraid." Mich. iv. 4.
—Here every one has full liberty to act as he pleaſes within the limits of the law; and every one is equally protected by the wiſdom and authority of it. What can we deſire more? Our government, it may be ſaid, is not perfect. No government ever was, or ever will be ſo. Man is himſelf imperfect: and all his works will neceſſarily favour of imperfection. If men are not ſatisfied with the conſtitution of this country, till by repeated amendments they have endeavoured to bring it to this imaginary ſtate; they will inevitably ruin it: they will loſe the ſubſtance by catching at the ſhadow. In extreme caſes alterations and amendments undoubtedly become neceſſary. Such gave occaſion both to the reformation and the revolution. Our grievances were become intolerable. But in ordinary caſes, and where the inconveniences complained of are ſuch only, as muſt naturally be

expected

expected in every ſtate and under every government, it would be folly to riſk ſubſtantial Good for imaginary Better. Wiſely was it obſerved by that great man Eraſmus two centuries ago*: " that all " innovation, if poſſible, is to be avoided; for " though ſome little improvement or advantage " may appear to be gained by it, yet the innova- " tion itſelf is dangerous; becauſe the laws and " cuſtoms of a nation or city are never changed " without diſorder and tumult."—Let us not then riſk the ſolid happineſs we enjoy for a ſhadow, a phantom, a chimæra. The character of the nation is high for generoſity, for courage and mag-

* Omnis novatio, quoad fieri poterit, fugienda principi. Nam etiam ſi quid in melius commutetur, tamen ipſa novitas offendit. Nec unquam ſine tumultu commutatus eſt, vel Reipublicæ ſtatus, vel publica civitatis conſuetudo, vel leges olim receptæ. Proinde ſi quid erit ejuſmodi ut ferri poſſit, non erit innovandum, ſed aut tolerare conveniet, aut commode ad meliorem uſum deflectere. Rurſum ſi quid erit ejus generis, ut tolerandum non ſit, id erit corrigendum, ſed arte ac paulatim.

Eraſmi Inſtitutio Principis Chriſtiani, Sect. de Artibus Pacis. } Baſileæ, apud Jo. Frobenium } 1516.

nanimity;

nanimity; ſo high as to excite even the admiration of our enemies; and to elicit the praiſe of all the world. Let it be as high for a religious and grateful ſenſe of the bleſſings we enjoy. Let us manifeſt this ſenſe in daily ſacrifices of praiſe and thankſgiving to God: in ſorrow and repentance for our ſins: in a zealous attachment to our preſent happy conſtitution: in ſubmiſſion to the laws: in loyalty to the king: and in unanimity amongſt ourſelves. Thus rightly and religiouſly diſpoſed, thus harmonized and united, we need not fear the malice of our enemies; but may reſt aſſured of the favour and protection of that gracious and good Being; whoſe eyes are over the righteous; and whoſe ears are ever open unto their prayers.

THE END.

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